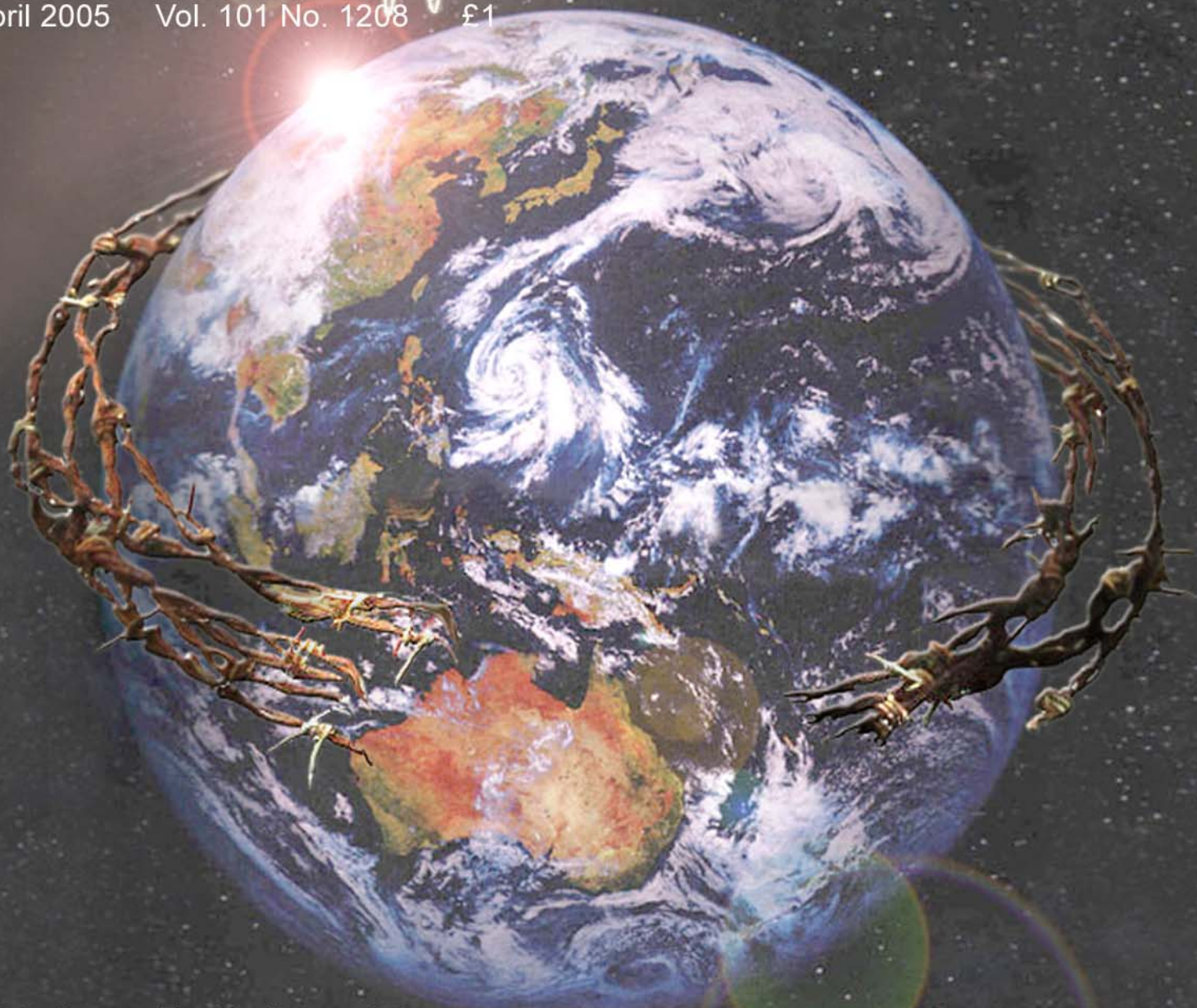


Socialist Standard

What is Common
Ownership?
What Socialism means
Organising Without Money
Rise and Fall of the NHS
Profit Motive: a Case Study

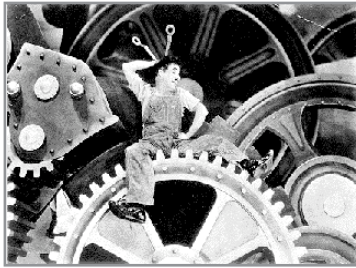
April 2005 Vol. 101 No. 1208 £1



World in Bonds or World in Common?

The case for Common Ownership

Journal of the Socialist Party—Companion Party of the World Socialist Movement



Mine, All Mine... Owning the means of production: Page 8



A fistful of popular culture: page 11



Just say arrgh... page 12

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“If the unthinkable happened sadists might find pleasure in the downfall of a politician as plausible, dishonest and obsessive as Blair. But what then? ”

Greasy Pole, page 19

Politics today is a game of Ins and Outs in which gangs of professional politicians compete with each other to attract votes, the gang securing a majority of seats in parliament assuming responsibility for running the political side of the profit system.

To win votes they have to promise - and be believed - to improve things both for the population in general, as by managing the economy so as to avoid slumps and crises, and for particular groups within the population.

When the economy is expanding or even just ticking over the Ins have the advantage. They can claim that this is due to their wise statesmanship and prudent management. Such claims are false as the economy goes its own way - expanding or contracting as the prospect of profits rises or falls - irrespective of which gang of politicians is in office. But making such claims can backfire as, when the economy falters, the Outs can blame this on the incompetence and mismanagement of the Ins. But that's not true either since politicians don't control the way the economy works.

The Labour politicians who took over from the Tories as the Ins in 1997 have been lucky in this respect. In the past, Labour periods in office had happened to coincide with the downturn phase of the economic cycle, but the last election in 2001 and the coming election this year have happened to coincide with the economy ticking over. So, instead of having to live up to their previous reputation of being the party of austerity, they have been in the position of being able to offer a few crumbs to voters.

But throwing crumbs to the people (or to carefully targeted sections of the people whose votes could swing things) is not the

main purpose of government. Marx once wrote that the government is "but a committee for managing the common



The Game

affairs of the whole bourgeoisie". And it's still true. The function of any government is to manage the common affairs of the capitalist class as a whole. This involves a number of things. Sustaining a context in which profit-making can continue. Spending the money raised from taxes (that are ultimately a burden on the capitalist class) in a prudent way on things that will benefit the capitalist class as a whole, such as providing them with an educated, relatively healthy and so productive workforce. Maintaining - and if need be using - armed forces to protect sources of raw materials, trade routes, investment outlets and markets abroad. That's what most government spending goes on, and balancing this against income from taxes is what budgets are essentially about.

It is only because wage and salary workers, active or retired, have the vote

that, occasionally if there's a small margin of money spare, a few crumbs are offered to some section or other of the electorate.

No doubt, the pensioners, the home buyers and the families offered a few hundred extra pounds a year will accept these crumbs cast before them by Gordon Brown in his pre-election budget. Hopefully, they won't accept them as bribes to vote for his particular gang of politicians, but simply because it would be stupid not to.

Nowadays most people have learned by experience and are rightly just as cynical about the politicians and their promises - and crumbs - as are politicians about how they get people to vote for them. But cynicism is not enough. This should be turned into rejection. The game of Ins and Outs, to decide which gang of professional politicians should manage the common affairs of the capitalist class, only continues because most of us agree to take part in it. But by voting for them we in effect give them the power to keep the capitalist system going. And that, not which particular gang of politicians happens to be in office, is the cause of today's problems since built-in to capitalism is putting making profits before satisfying people's needs.

Socialists are only too well aware that most people put up with capitalism, and go along with its political game of Ins and Outs in the hope of getting a few crumbs out of it, because they see no practicable alternative. But there is an alternative, as we explain in the articles in this issue. Politics should be more than individuals deciding which politicians to trust to deliver some crumbs that they think will benefit them individually. It should be about collective action to change society. About taking over the whole bakery.

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What would socialist society do about nuclear energy?

The need for a radically new energy technology is not just pressing. As India, Asia and China rapidly industrialise, it's becoming a crunch issue. If China were to burn coal at the current U.S. level of two tons per person, the country would use 2.8 billion tons per year--more than current world production of 2.5 billion tons.

And if the Chinese use oil at the same rate as Americans now do, by 2031 China would need 99 million barrels of oil a day. The world currently produces 79 million barrels per day and may never produce much more than that (*Yahoo News*, March 9)

Nuclear fission is firmly back on the agenda, with Labour and Tory hedging on the subject and only the unelectable Lib-Dems against. But the waste problem is unsolved and waste free nuclear (hot) fusion is still decades and hundreds of billions of dollars away. If only there was another way.



Eyes on the prize: Rusi Taleyarkhan claims to have performed bubble fusion. Critics say it's just hot air.

For scientists, it was like the moment Sir Perceval murmurs the fateful words in King Arthur's ear: "Sire, I have seen it. The Grail. I had it in my very hands." When the world's first successful cold fusion experiment was announced in 1989 the scientific establishment dropped its collective clipboard, rubbed its horn-rimmed glasses and gasped. It couldn't

be. Cold fusion, at last! Indeed it couldn't, and alas, it wasn't. Like Sir Perceval, the team at Oak Ridge in Tennessee found it and lost it again. Nobody could reproduce the experiment.

Cold fusion - the ability to convert matter into energy the same way the sun does it, but without the temperatures - is so fantastic an idea that everybody wants it to be true. A single match will light a cigarette, but the mass of that match, if converted according to Einstein's equation 'Energy = Mass times the speed of light', would light London for months. Forget Nobel prizes, the scientist who delivers success at this will be famous forever for abolishing the world's energy problems - forever.

The idea of fusing heavy hydrogen nuclei at temperatures less than 10 million degrees Kelvin goes against every scientific principle. Cold fusion was off the agenda. And then,

incredibly, with a new technique called sonoluminescence, it seemed possible again. By focusing sound waves into bubbles in acetone, experimenters, again at Oak Ridge, found bubbles forming with fantastic levels of heat, up to 10,000 Kelvin. The process has been called the 'star in a jar'.

But was it fusion? BBC *Horizon* decided to recreate the experiment into bubble fusion (Feb 17) and got a negative result. Improved timings showed no generation of neutrons, one sure sign of fusion. Another problem was that 10,000 K

is orders of magnitude too low for fusion. But the controversy rages on. The sun's surface is only 7,000K because all the real heat is indoors, and new measurements suggest it may be the same with bubble fusion, with new bubbles in sulphuric acid being the hottest ever recorded (*New Scientist*, March 5).

What's interesting is that infinite energy would be as uncomfortable to capitalist markets as it is to scientific orthodoxy. It could never be allowed to get out. If bubble fusion ever becomes proved, we can absolutely rely on one thing - our electricity bills won't go down. New technology tends to deliver wealth upwards, to the rich who own and control it,

not downwards to the rest of us. An orgy of free energy would still have to wait for socialist society to be realized.



At ten million degrees kelvin nobody does it better - yet.

Will there be religion in socialist society?

Opinions are divided. Religious people obviously

think there will be religion no matter what economic arrangements exist. Socialists tend to regard religion as the mind's desperate attempt to invent unfalsifiable explanations for a disordered and insane reality, and they also point to religion's long history of being used by ruling elites to control ignorant and fearful populations.

History indicates that the more a society knows about the world through science the less religious it becomes. In Britain today hundreds of parishes have fewer than ten in the congregation, many churches have closed down (some of them to become pubs, encouragingly) while others are closed through the winter or used as derelict hang-outs for drug addicts and prostitutes (*BBC1 News*, Jan 19). The raging controversy over allowing homosexuality in the Anglican church is partly informed by the sheer difficulty of getting any priests at all. The average age of a priest is 68, and in ten years half of them will be dead. In France there are so few ordinations that priests are being imported from Senegal and Burkina

Faso to mind parishes with 40 churches but congregations of five. These African priests blame western security and comfort (!), since back home they can get 5000 to a Sunday sermon (*BBC Radio 4*, Jan 6).

The question is also open from a scientific perspective. Evolutionary

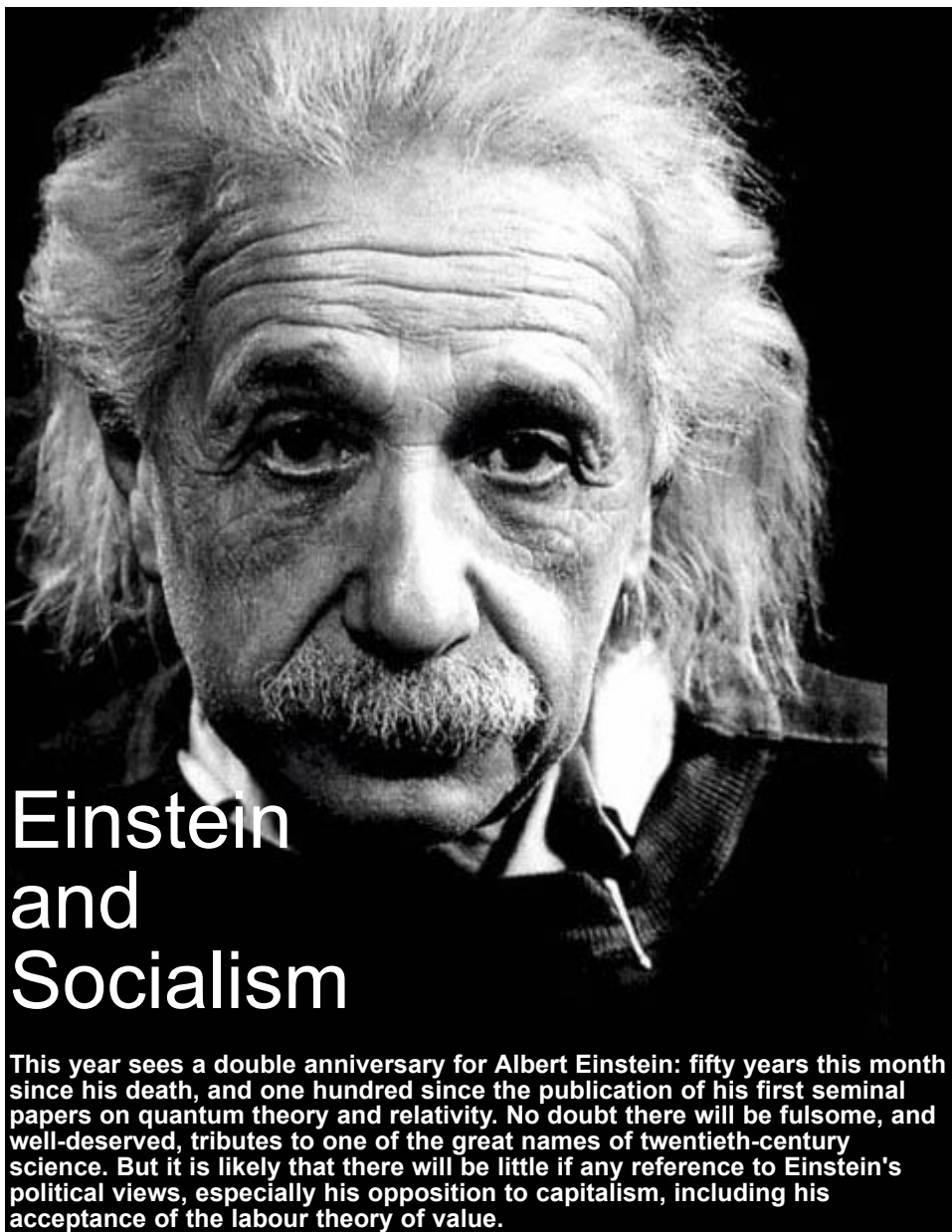
Shrinking congregations: the Pope tries to spot a Catholic.



biologists have taken up E.O. Wilson's idea that religion has an evolutionary advantage, and gone looking for the genetic evidence. The geneticist Dean Hamer in 'The God Gene' even claims to have found the holy gene itself, VMAT2 (*New York Times*, Feb 19) while

the neuropsychologist Michael Persinger claimed to be able to produce religious states in people by stimulating their temporal lobes with magnets (*Economist*, Dec 16, 04), although later research using double-blind techniques has refuted this claim. Evidence supposedly citing identical twins' similar levels of spirituality are scarcely conclusive since 'spirituality', if it exists, can not be measured.

Socialist society is likely to be full of parties, celebrations and seasonal rituals, because they're fun and because we all like to find meaning in life, but there's no scientific evidence that socialists are ever likely to be more cosmic than sun-worshippers in a beach paradise.



Einstein and Socialism

This year sees a double anniversary for Albert Einstein: fifty years this month since his death, and one hundred since the publication of his first seminal papers on quantum theory and relativity. No doubt there will be fulsome, and well-deserved, tributes to one of the great names of twentieth-century science. But it is likely that there will be little if any reference to Einstein's political views, especially his opposition to capitalism, including his acceptance of the labour theory of value.

In 1949, Einstein published an article 'Why Socialism?' in the first issue of the American left-wing journal *Monthly Review*. It is available on the web at various places, e.g. <http://www.monthlyreview.org/598Einst.htm>. In it he argued that class society is an instance of 'the predatory phase' of human development (in Thorstein Veblen's phrase). Yet humans depend on society to provide food, clothing, a home and so on. We have a fixed and unalterable biological constitution, but during our lives we acquire a 'cultural constitution' which is subject to change. Anthropological research shows that people's social behaviour differs greatly, so our biological make-up does not determine the way we live.

But small groups of humans cannot be self-sufficient: 'mankind constitutes even now a planetary community of production and consumption.' This dependence on society, however, is seen as a threat to our existence rather than as a positive asset. This is largely due to 'the economic anarchy of capitalist society'. All those who do not share in the ownership of the means of production, Einstein calls workers. Workers' wages are determined not by the value of what they produce but by their minimum

needs. As private capital becomes more and more concentrated, it achieves a power that even democratic politics cannot check.

Under capitalism, he continues, production is for profit, not use. Unemployment exists almost always, and workers are in fear of losing their jobs. Unlimited competition results in an enormous waste of labour. The worst evil of capitalism, he says, is the 'crippling of individuals', as education inculcates competitive notions.

Having given a pretty decent sketch of how capitalism works and of what's wrong with it, Einstein goes on to advocate a planned economy which guarantees a livelihood to everyone and adjusts production to the needs of the community. But a planned economy, he recognises, is not socialism, as it may involve 'the complete enslavement of the individual' (so perhaps he had Russian-style state capitalism in mind?). And after a few misguided remarks about so-called problems of socialism (how to limit the power of the bureaucracy? etc), Einstein closes his contribution. It's a shame that he is so inconclusive, but his article is still well worth reading, even if you can't get through it at the speed of light.

PB

Red Snapper

Sound bites and unsound nibbles

I don't think we should be battering this subject to death."
Martin McGuinness to John Humphries, on IRA members who murdered Robert McCartney by, er, battering him to death. BBC R4, March 9, 8.00am.

It will be scrapped. I am determined to ensure that the rights of those who play by the rules are respected."
Michael Howard on the Human Rights Act, The Guardian, March 19.

People who have been arrested say they've been brutalised - the tactics used are beyond belief."
Dr Rafiullah Bidar, regional director of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, on the treatment of detainees by the US in Afghanistan. Guardian, March 19.

Afghanistan is being transformed into an enormous US jail."
Nader Nadery, of the Human Rights Commission. Guardian, March 19.

One might have expected a little humility from the Bush administration after its destruction and occupation of Iraq."
Lindsey German, convenor of March 19th's anti-war protest in London. Independent, March 19.

I've not seen anything like this since the Julius Streicher Nazi campaign against Jews."
Mike Jempson, Mediawise, on The Sun's recent campaign against Travellers. bbc.co.uk, March 11.

War on gipsy free-for-all".
The Sun, March 9

The man who gave us the dodgy dossier is now giving us The Big Lie.... The man is rattled."
Liam Fox, co-chairman of the Tory party, Independent, March 19

Since its origin in the early 19th century, the term 'socialism' has evolved to mean many different things to many different people, and has been misused by dictatorships to describe their Draconian management of capitalism. Pieter Lawrence explores what 'socialism' really means.

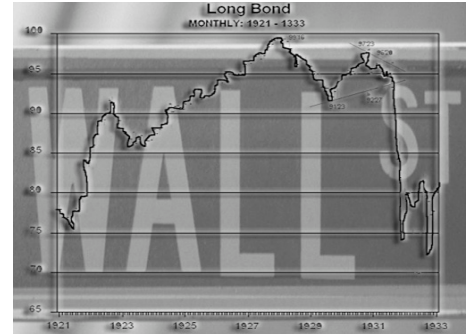
What socialism means



Levelling distinctions: the peasants' revolt



Engels and Marx



Inherently unpredictable: the market

Although the word socialism is itself more or less modern, its meaning can be said to go back to early religious sects of the ancient world and was taken up by religious dissidents in mediaeval times. Words attributed to John Ball during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 capture its meaning very well: "My friends, things cannot go well in England, nor ever, until everything shall be held in common, when there shall be neither vassal nor lord and all distinctions levelled, when lords shall be no more masters than ourselves."

But it was not until the 19th Century that the concept of socialism (or communism) was developed by utopian socialists and then more systematically by Marx and Engels. Since the early 19th Century socialism has meant an alternative, classless society which can be set out under three main headings as follows:-

- 1. Common Ownership.**
- 2. Democratic Control.**
- 3. Production solely for use.**

These features of socialist society would be dependent on each other and could only operate together as basic parts of an integrated social system. In combination, these define a way of organising society that in every important aspect of production, distribution, decision making and social administration, is clearly distinguished from the operation of capitalist society.

1. Common ownership means that the entire structure of production and all natural resources be held in common by all people. This means that every person will stand in equal relationship with every other person with respect to the means of producing the things we need to live, that is, mines, industrial plants, manufacturing units, all land and farms, and all means of transport and distribution. This also means the common ownership of all natural resources.

Perhaps "common ownership" is partly a misnomer because what is meant is that means of production and resources would not be owned by anyone. In place of the property relationships of owners and non-owners, means of production will simply be available to the whole community to be used and developed solely for the needs of all people.

2. Democratic control means that social policy would be decided by communities. In place of rule by governments, public decisions would be made by people themselves. One great advantage of democratic practice in socialism would be not only the organisation of decision making but also the freedom to carry out those decisions. This freedom of action would arise from direct control of community affairs following the enactment of common ownership and removal of the economic constraints of the capitalist system. Without powers of action decision-making is meaningless.

3. Production solely for use means just what it says. People in socialism would be free to co-operate voluntarily with each other in producing goods directly for the needs of the community. This would be useful labour co-operating to produce useful goods solely for consumption. Production solely for use would replace production for sale at a profit. Things produced for sale under the capitalist system are of course intended to supply a need of one kind or another but as commodities they are produced primarily with a view to money gain and the increase of money capital. As a general rule the market system is a system of 'no profit no production'. In socialism this profit motive would be entirely removed.

"To live in a classless society would be in the interests of all its members"

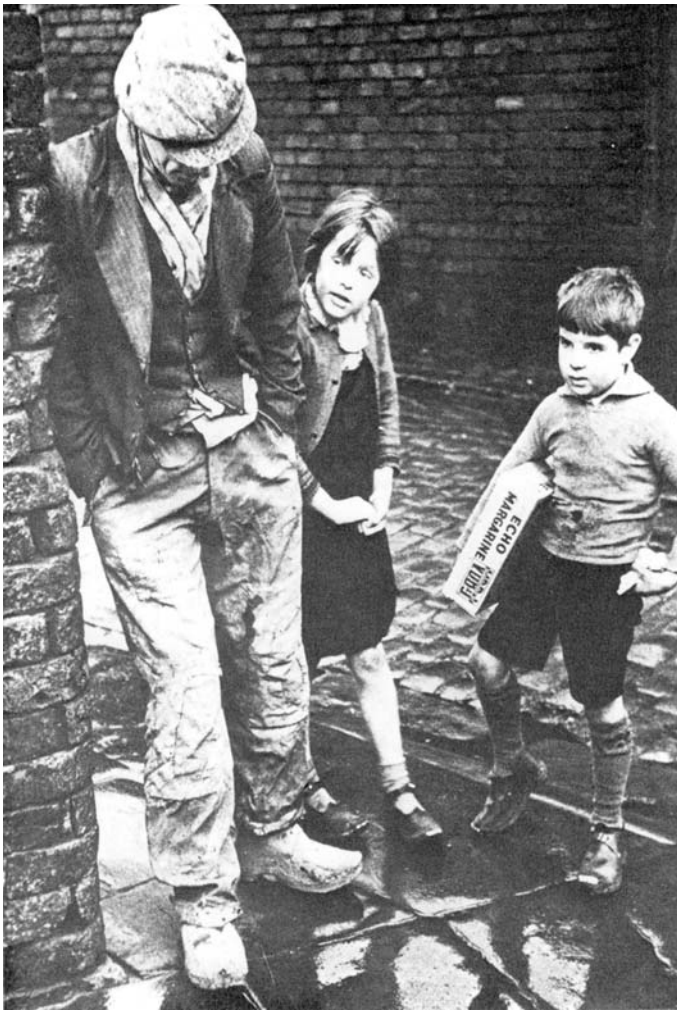
In a moneyless socialist society the factors of production would operate only in a useful form and not as economic categories with a price. Labour would not be wage labour serving the interests of an employer but would be free labour. People at work would be creating only useful things and not economic values from which profit is derived.

There should be no doubt that these basic features that define socialism clearly distinguished it from the capitalist system. Common ownership of means of production would be in direct opposition to private, corporate or state ownership; democratic control would be fundamentally different from rule by governments; production for needs would be in direct opposition to production for sale at a profit. These contrasting features of the two systems cannot be operated together; they are mutually exclusive. The mistaken idea that they can be operated together has been a major cause of political confusion about what socialism means.

Production solely for needs

What is meant by needs should not be understood as mere personal consumption. It should not suggest a rampant consumerist culture. Production for needs would include a wide range of considerations such as the need to protect and conserve the environment. In defining socialism we should emphasise that it will provide for one vital need in a way that is impossible under the capitalist system. This is the need of peoples throughout the world to bring the organisation of their community affairs under their own democratic control and to develop them in the interests of the whole community.

It was with the emergence of the capitalist system that society lost its direct control of its productive resources. In previous societies, accepting that they were ruled by privileged classes in their own interests, it was often the case that production was at near maximum capacity given the technology and resources



Crisis of capitalism: the depression

available and this determined what could be distributed. In times of good harvests the whole community could benefit in some shape or form. But with the development of the capitalist system this was eroded as what is produced depends crucially on what can be sold. This means that distribution through sale in the markets determines production and this is always less than what could be produced.

Market capacity is inherently unpredictable. If too many goods are produced for a market and they remain unsold, a crisis and recession may occur with reduced production, increased unemployment, bankruptcies, and large scale writing-off of capital values. Despite the many attempts that have been made, no theory of economic management has ever been able to predict or control the anarchic conditions of the market system. This is rule by market forces which serve minority interests and which generate the insecurities, crises and conflicts that shape the way we live. The fact that we have great powers of production that cannot be organised and fully used for the benefit of all people has devastating consequences and is at the root of most social problems.

In this way, the capitalist system places the production of goods and services,

on which the quality of all our lives depends, outside the direct control of society. Contrary to this, a socialist system would bring the entire organisation of production and distribution under democratic social control.

Social class

A further basic distinction between the two systems is that whereas the capitalist system is inherently class ridden, in socialism, social relationships of common ownership and equality will end class divisions. Much discussion of class centres on various sociological differences between groups which may be useful for some purposes. However, sociological differences can tell us little when seeking to explain how production is organised.

Some evidence may suggest, superficially, that we live in a society of greater equality. For example, we can accept that not so long ago "toffs" were

people who played golf and went on motoring holidays, touring the Continent. Now, many people from all walks of life do these things. This shows that these pursuits have become relatively cheaper and that some working people are now able to enjoy them, but this in no way alters the economic relationships of production. It does not alter the economic, class relationship between capital and labour which dominates the way we live. At the point of production, the workers and their employers who may be sharing a golf course in their leisure time remain in a

relationship of conflicting economic interests which, whilst it continues, must always condemn our society to the class divisions of strife and to the many ugly comparisons that we see of poverty amidst luxury. Class is a social relationship that invades and has a corrupting

influence on every part of our lives.

An economic definition of class based on the categories of capital and labour in a system of commodity production is basic to our explanation of how we produce and distribute wealth and the economic motives that are involved. Social class defined as economic relationships is a key to how the operation of the market puts profit before needs and places constraints on all our activities. Our lives and the quality of our society depend upon our relationships of production and on the services we can

provide. An analysis using economic/class categories tells us who gets what from the pool of wealth that is made available and how a privileged class has accumulated great wealth and property; it therefore explains the great social differences that we see about us.

In addition, we find that increasingly, giant global corporations own and control the world production of goods and services together with the natural resources of the planet. The sole object is to amass greater concentrations of capital and to increase their economic and political powers.

We live in a society of deep class divisions with a conflict of economic interests between those who work the productive system and those who own it. This economic conflict can only be reconciled by the relationships of equality and cooperation that would integrate the community in socialism.

Whilst it is right to feel outrage at the great class divisions that exist socialists do not come to this question in a negative spirit of class hostility. The aim is to end it. Class conflict has gone on for too long; there has been too much strife and we have to heal the wounds of history through entirely democratic means.

Class society is both morally and materially indefensible. It need not linger on and on as part of an outdated system. An ethical society would be one in which all people would live their lives, free from the disadvantages of under privilege and class injustice. To live in a classless society would be in the interests of all its members. Freedom for every person to develop their skills and talents on equal terms could benefit everyone. Equality has the potential to enrich all our lives and would be a basis for a true community of shared interests.

Socialism - a human-centred way of life

Having set out what socialism means, and having set out features that distinguish it clearly from capitalism, these can be summarised as one all important difference. Whereas the capitalist system works for sectional economic ends that are alien to the interests of the whole community, a socialist system would be wholly dedicated to the interests of all people. There would also be a difference of complexity and simplicity. Whereas, working within the complex economic limitations of the market system, our endeavours are frustrated and often blocked by the barriers of costs, in a socialist society, communities would be free to set up their goals and then organise their resources of labour, materials and technology to achieve them in a straightforward way. People in socialism would need only to work with the material factors of production and not any economic factors.

Given the control of human affairs that a socialist system would bring, people in socialism would be able to take charge of their destiny. What is undeniable is that we are a species with great talents. In science, technology, in art, crafts and design we can call upon a wide range of great skills. The point now is to release these for the benefit of humanity. ■

PIETER LAWRENCE

John Major didn't believe in 'class society', Margaret Thatcher didn't even believe in 'society', but private ownership is the defining factor of both. Meanwhile the concept of common ownership has only resulted in feeble nationalisation programmes. So, the question is:

What is common ownership?



The basis of any society is the way its members are organised for the production and distribution of wealth.

Where a section of society controls the use of the means of production, then there is a class society. Another way of putting this is that the members of this section or class own the means of production, since to be in a position to control the use of something is effectively to own it, whether or not this is accompanied by some legal title deed.

It follows that a classless society is one in which the use of the means of production is controlled by all members of society on an equal basis, and not just by a section of them to the exclusion of the rest. James Burnham put this rather well in a passage in his book *The Managerial Revolution*:

"For a society to be 'classless'

would mean that within society there would be no group (with the exception, perhaps, of temporary delegate bodies, freely elected by the community and subject always to recall) which would exercise, as a group, any special control over access to the instruments of production; and no group receiving, as a group, preferential treatment in distribution"

In a classless society every member is in a position to take part, on equal terms with every other member, in deciding how the means of production should be used. Every member of society is socially equal, standing in exactly the same relationship to the means of production as every other member. Similarly, every member of society has access to the fruits of production on an equal footing.

Once the use of the means of production is under the democratic

control of all members of society, class ownership has been abolished. The means of production can still be said to belong to those who control and benefit from their use, in this case to the whole population organised on a democratic basis, and so to be "commonly owned" by them. Common

ownership has been defined as:

"A state of affairs in which no person is excluded from the possibility of controlling, using and managing the means of production, distribution and consumption. Each member of society can acquire the capacity, that is to say, has the opportunity to realise a variety of goals, for example, to consume what they want, to use means of production for the purposes of socially necessary or unnecessary work, to administer production and distribution, to plan to allocate resources, and to make decisions about short term and long term collective goals. Common ownership, then, refers to every individual's potential ability to benefit from the wealth of society and to participate in its running" (Jean-Claude Bragard, *An Investigation of Marx's Concept of Communism*, his emphasis).

Even so, to use the word "ownership" can be misleading in that this does not fully bring out the fact that the transfer to all members of society of the power to control the production of wealth makes the very concept of property redundant. With common ownership no one is excluded from the possibility of controlling or benefiting from the use of the means of production, so that with reference to them the concept of property in the sense of exclusive possession is meaningless: no one is excluded, there are no non-owners.

We could invent some new term such as "no-ownership" and talk about the classless alternative society to capitalism being a "no-ownership" society, but the same idea can be expressed without having to do this if common ownership is understood as being a social relationship and not a form of property ownership. This social relationship-equality between human beings with regard to the control of the use of the means of production-can equally accurately be described by the terms "classless society" and "democratic control" as by "common ownership" since these three terms are only different ways of describing it from different angles. The use of the term "common ownership" to refer to the basic social relationship of the alternative society to capitalism is not to be taken to imply therefore that common ownership of the means of production could exist without democratic control. Common ownership means democratic control means a classless society.

When we refer to the society based on common ownership, generally we use the term "socialism", though we have no objection to others using "communism", since for us these terms mean exactly the same and are interchangeable.

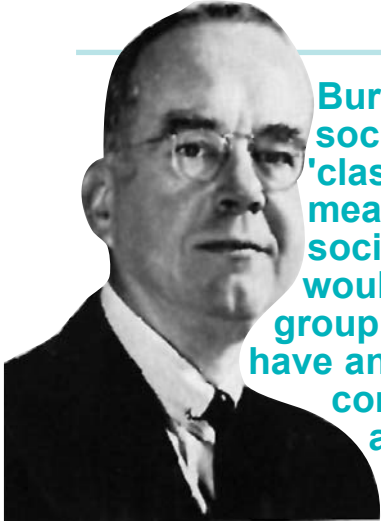
Not state ownership

Common ownership is not to be confused with state ownership, since an organ of coercion, or state, has no place in socialism. A class society is a society with a state because sectional control over the means of production and the exclusion of the rest of the population cannot be asserted without coercion, and so without a special



I don't think much of this Common Ownership idea, Margaret.

That's because you never owned the Commons, William.



Burnham: "For a society to be 'classless' would mean that within society there would be no group which would have any special control over access to the instruments of

production; and no group receiving preferential treatment in distribution"

organ to exercise this coercion. On the other hand, a classless society is a stateless society because such an organ of coercion becomes unnecessary as soon as all members of society stand in the same relationship with regard to the control of the use of the means of production. The existence of a state as an instrument of class political control and coercion is quite incompatible with the existence of the social relationship of common ownership. State ownership is a form of exclusive property ownership which implies a social relationship which is totally different from socialism.

Common ownership is a social relationship of equality and democracy which makes the concept of property redundant because there are no longer any excluded non-owners. State ownership, on the other hand, presupposes the existence of a government machine, a legal system, armed forces and the other features of an institutionalised organ of coercion. State-owned means of production belong to an institution which confronts the members of society, coerces them and dominates them, both as individuals and as a collectivity. Under state ownership the answer to the question "who owns the means of production?" is not "everybody" or "nobody" as with common ownership; it is "the state". In

other words, when a state owns the means of production, the members of society remain non-owners, excluded from control. Both legally and socially, the means of production belong not to them, but to the state, which stands as an independent power between them and the means of production.

The state is not an abstraction floating above society and its members; it is a social institution, and, as such, a group of human beings, a section of society, organised in a particular way. This is why, strictly speaking, we should have written above that the state confronts most members of society and excludes most of them from control of the means of production. For wherever there is a state, there is always a group of human beings who stand in a different relationship to it from most members of society: not as the dominated, nor as the excluded, but as the dominators and the excluders. Under state ownership, this group controls the use of the means of production to the exclusion of the other members of society. In this sense, it owns the means of production, whether or not this is formally and legally recognised.

Another reason why state ownership and socialism are incompatible is that the state is a national institution which exercises political control over a limited geographical area. Since capitalism is a world system, the complete state ownership of the means of production within a given political area cannot represent the abolition of capitalism, even within that area. What it does mean is the establishment of some form of state capitalism whose internal mode of operation is conditioned by the fact that it has to compete in a world market context against other capitals.

Since today capitalism is worldwide, the society which replaces capitalism can only be worldwide. The only socialism possible today is world socialism. No more than capitalism can socialism exist in one country. So the common ownership of socialism is the

common ownership of the world, of its natural and industrial resources, by the whole of humanity. Socialism can only be a universal society in which all that is in and on the Earth has become the common heritage of all humankind, and in which the division of the world into states has given way to a world without frontiers with a democratic world administration as well as local and regional democracy. ■

ADAM BUICK



Cooking the Books (1)

The other Adam Smith

Gordon Brown grew up in the Scottish seaside town of Kirkcaldy where his father was a minister in one of the local kirks.

Adam Smith was born there in 1723, though his father was a customs official. In February, at Brown's invitation, Alan Greenspan, chairman of the US Federal Reserve Board, visited Kirkcaldy to deliver a lecture on Adam Smith.

Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was, said Greenspan, "one of the great achievements in human intellectual history". Smith's view that capitalists should be allowed by governments to pursue profits unhindered since, "led by an invisible hand", this resulted in the "public good" being promoted had, he argued, become "the sole remaining effective paradigm for economic organisation" (*The Times*, 7 February).

That's the side of Smith that is promoted by free-marketeers such as the Adam Smith Institute. But that's only one side of his theories. Do the free-marketeers - does Greenspan - know that the *Wealth of Nations* opens with a declaration that useful things are produced by labour: "The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies it with all the necessities and conveniences of life which it annually consumes"? Or that Smith went on to expound a labour theory of value: "Labour is the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities" (Book I, chapter V)?

Smith even went so far as to identify profits as deriving from the value added by workers in the process of production:

"As soon as stock has accumulated in the hands of particular persons, some of them will naturally employ it in setting to work industrious people, whom they will supply with materials and subsistence, in order to make a profit by the sale of their work, or by what their labour adds to the value of the materials . . . The value which the workmen add to the materials . . . resolves itself . . . into two parts, of which one pays their wages, the other the profits of their employer upon the whole stock of materials and wages which he advanced" (Book I, chapter VI).

Smith's labour theory of value was refined by David Ricardo and used by early critics of capitalism to argue that the capitalists were exploiters who robbed the workers of a part of the product of their labour. Marx took over and further developed this labour theory of value as the basis for his analysis of capitalism which saw the capitalists' pursuit of profit as seeking to extract a maximum of unpaid labour from the working class.

The "public good" which Smith argued was promoted by letting capitalists pursue profits was an increase in the total amount of wealth in existence. Marx didn't deny this, but argued that under capitalism this increase was inevitably unevenly divided: more went to capitalists as accumulated capital than to the actual wealth-producers as increased wages (if that). What Smith's "invisible hand" did, if you like, was to build-up in this way the material basis for a socialist society of common ownership and democratic control. Which is the "sole effective paradigm" for ensuring that the productive forces built up under capitalism can be used for the benefit of all.



Common Ownership - No Exclusion Zones

How would common ownership and democratic control work in practice? Without a price mechanism some critics do not understand how signals can pass from the user to the producer or how decisions about production can be made. Yet such non-market systems already exist even within capitalism and a study of these can give useful insights into the practical operation of a socialist production and distribution system.

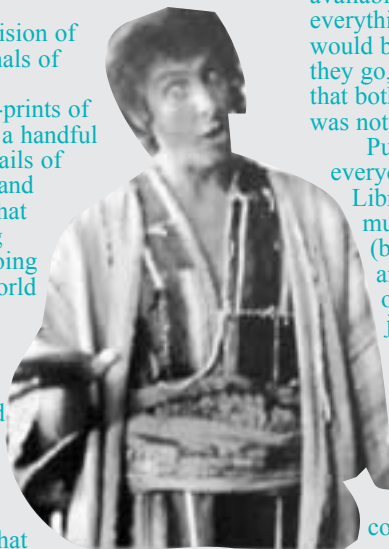
What distinguishes the Socialist Party from the leftists is that when we talk of common ownership we do not just include the means of production, but also, specifically, call for the common and democratic control of the means of distribution. Equal access to the common store without requirement of exchange or payment is one of the things we consider to be the hallmark of genuine socialism. After all, you cannot buy something you already own.

To people living in a society where everything has a price, where access to any aspect of our society from necessities to leisure and culture comes with a price tag, such a system seems alien, or possibly even naively utopian. Clever apologists of gross inequality and privilege even try to claim that it is categorically impossible to organise provision of any good or service without the vital signals of monetary exchange or market haggling.

Socialists are loath to draw up blue-prints of the future. It would be undemocratic for a handful of us now without access to the exact details of available resources and conditions to try and draw up rigid plans. We also recognise that there may not be one single way of doing things, and precise details and ways of doing things might vary from one part of the world to another, even between neighbouring communities. Of course, we can reach logical conclusions based on basic premises - that socialism will be necessarily democratic, for example - and can outline broad principles or options that could be applied. That is, we do not have to draw up a plan for socialism, but broadly demonstrate that it is possible.

We draw upon scientific methods, that is, we do not come up with a dream and try and fix it to reality, but, rather, we look to the real world to see how it is, and how it could be. Just as the market - the central feature of capitalism - predated the explosion of that society across the globe, so too are principles and practices that socialism could use latent in our world today. That is, provision of services based on free access at the point of use are more common in the world today than the ideologues of capitalism would have us believe.

Consider shopping in socialism. A person would walk into the store, browse the shelves, select what they want, and then arrange to take it away. They would take as much as they think



Whaddya mean, you won't haggle over economic calculation? I'm telling you it's a categorical impossibility mate. Now are you telling me this isn't worth ten shekels?



they would need, sure in the knowledge that more will be readily available should they need more not to try and take and hoard everything. If what they want is not available, staff and procedures would be on hand to obtain the goods from another source. Before they go, they could let the store crew know what they've taken, so that both the staff and other consumers would know what was and was not available from the inventory.

Put like that, it sounds convoluted, but it is what happens everyday in local public libraries throughout Britain. Under the Libraries, Archives and Museums Act of 1963, local authorities must provide books and magazines free of charge, and obtain (by purchase if necessary, but usually from other libraries) anything they do not have immediately to hand. Currently, over 60 percent of library patrons get what they want from just cold calling into their local branch.

Big businesses provide a similar service. Blockbusters video stores provide rental goods for a charge per loan. Libraries too provide videos, and the difference between their operating parameters is clear. Big video stores overwhelmingly stock the latest hits in huge bundles, with older or niche films harder to find, while local libraries have a wider range of stock. Market provision leads to conformity more than conscious service. Libraries, however, are compelled by competition law not to undercut video stores (which they could do). That is, they are prevented from out-performing commercial rivals by legal fiat.

Libraries exhibit a number of non-monetary techniques for allocating resources, which they mix to various degrees, and each of which would be suitable for use in socialism. Library staff use published data to provide items to fulfil the publicly stated service level agreement in terms of the stock that users can assume they will find in the library. Once the stock is there, users can take it from the shelves on a first-come first served basis. If it is already taken, they can be put into a queue to receive it next, or they can order one to be brought in from another institution. If an item is highly popular, its terms of availability may be restricted to enable more people to have access



Could we use things money?

to it, and people always have the option of trying a different source of information. In some libraries, if some users have particular needs, they may have their borrowing limit increased to be able to take more items out.

That is, a mix of queuing, lottery and rationing are used in various mixtures to maximise the use of resources. Alongside this,

“(Non-market distribution) sounds convoluted, but it is what happens everyday in local public libraries throughout Britain.”

the library catalogue - the inventory of available stock which includes its current location and status - can be used to co-ordinate between both library users and staff so that everyone can control their use of the library and its goods. This information, unlike market information which travels at the speed of goods to market, travels at the speed of light. Today, it is possible to discover, via the internet, that the *Communist Manifesto* is available in the Mary L. Cook Public Library in Waynesville Ohio, shelved in the social sciences section. If that book were not available in a local library, it would be possible to ask them, possibly ultimately, to obtain it from this source.

Even the objections that these libraries exist within capitalism doesn't bear much scrutiny. Although they must buy their books, it is possible to calculate how much would need to be spent to maintain the agreed stock levels, and set the budget accordingly. Publishers often tailor their print runs to their expectations of the number of libraries that will stock a title (and will often cancel titles if too few institutions do not order it via pre-publication data). The money largely follows the quality management.

Some parts of library management now might not be needed. Currently, a lot of personal detail is held by libraries in order to help protect their stock and monitor its usage. To generalise this might require some sort of identity registration, which some people may or may not find objectionable; but even then, an anonymous system like loyalty cards wherein the bearer of the card can simply record information whenever they remove stock could be used to see what combinations of goods people generally withdraw in so as to help ordering and stocking the stores. Again, this is a detail that can be left to the people who will live in socialism, but it is clear that we do not need an authoritarian state dictating each person's precise ration as some commissars of capitalism might pretend.

This is just one, almost random example of the ways in which workers, with all their skills and experience of co-operating to run capitalism in the interests of the capitalists, could begin to run society in their own interest. We do not need to build the new society in the womb of the old, that is here already. What we need is to decide that we have the way to actively declare an end to unnecessary want, and build a free co-operative commonwealth so that "poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality and slavery to freedom." ■
PIK SMEET

Blockbuster profits

● The cinema and video industries make two things: films and, more importantly, money. Shed-loads of it and over a long period. In the 1920s *The Birth of a Nation* cost United Artists \$110,000 to produce; it eventually grossed sixty million (thanks due to L. Menand in the 7 February issue of the *New Yorker* for that and some other facts in this article). More recently, *Titanic* took in \$1.85 billion at the box office - many times what it cost. Of course some films don't make money and some even lose it. But overall Hollywood, Bollywood and lesser-known 'woods' are oligarchies designed for the enrichment of the oligarchs.

It isn't just the movie business that seeks and makes a

profit from movies. The key to the system is marketing. A lot of money is spent on creating "buzz" - a diffused sense in the public that a particular movie is on the way. Previews are part of "buzz", as is "coverage" of forthcoming movies in media outlets that are often owned by the same conglomerate that owns the studio. The makers of *Jurassic Park* sold a hundred licences for a thousand dinosaur products.

The content of the films and videos reflects conditions in the world of which they are part. Soon after 9/11 Hollywood temporarily abandoned the hyperviolent spectacles that dominated cinema in the late 1990s. The public was thought to be in need of escape from such horrors. However, by 2003 it was a return to business as usual. *Daredevil*, *Cold Mountain*, *Gods and Generals* and *The Core* offered spectacles of

contemporary, futuristic or historical destruction and carnage.

A recent British study of blockbuster audiences (by M. Jancovich, and L. Faire, 'The best place to see a film', in *Movie Blockbusters*) indicates that at least some audiences are not happy with the conditions in which they are paying customers. Apparently a fairly common complaint is that the cinema is an emotionally cold place. The audience is a mass but not a community. There's no place to interact with one another or talk about the film afterwards.

What of the future of the cinema and the video in socialism? To some extent I go along with the safe but insipid view that "the people at the time will decide". But I'd like to be a

bit braver (or more foolhardy?) than that. I endorse Menand's rejection of films that include any combination of wizards, slinky women of few words, men who can expertly drive anything or leap safely from the top of anything, characters from comic books, explosions, a computer whizz with attitude, or an incarnation of pure evil. I hope there will be more films like Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake*, a moving and beautiful depiction of British working-class life in the 1950s. ■


STAN PARKER



Vera Drake: No bombs, bangs or busted blocks, just good film-making.

The Rise and Fall of the NHS

Can capitalism ever run the NHS effectively, or is Labour's 1948 flagship doomed always to navigate dangerous waters? CYR investigates.

 The National Health Service is trumpeted as the finest achievement of the Labour Party throughout its entire history. For years Labour supporters when tackled on the non-socialist and pro-capitalist nature of the Labour Party would reply with the one riposte, 'Ah, but what about the NHS?' Regarded by many Labour supporters as a socialist measure and holding out a promise of solving one of the most distressing problems of being a worker, being looked after when you were ill, it is hardly surprising that it was seen as a huge step forward in working class emancipation. One reform out of the multitude of reforms put into practice by a reformist party has survived - has it worked?

What did the NHS claim to do at its inception? Its chief architect Aneurin Bevan was very sure of his aims: it was to be an institution which would take care of all the medical needs of the working class for evermore and, hold your breath, without charge. However expensive the treatment might be medical attention could be obtained for all. For free! But it left a question hanging in the air, why was it only the working class who needed this ambitious solution? There was no problem for the capitalist class, who didn't need a health service. They could obtain all that was available from existing medical services by paying for it.

However, in the context of the time and given the pro capitalist inclinations of the Labour Party it was a bold, even visionary solution to the poor state of health of the mass of the working class after a long period of economic depression followed by six years of war. A situation, that had already been a serious cause of concern for government before the war. (Though in some respects the wartime diet plus the fact that unemployment had virtually ended for the duration had improved health standards). The NHS plan struck an immediate chord with the mass of the working class who saw in it a promise

for massive changes for the better in the post-war period. Carried away by the prospect of free teeth and glasses for all, the NHS helped to allay the grim years of rationing and shortages and helped to secure a second term for the Labour Government.



Bevan is usually given sole credit for the NHS, but the real picture is slightly different. Like its companion, the Beveridge scheme for social security, it was implemented by the Labour Party but had the support of other parties, who generally recognised that some form of welfare was badly needed. So the NHS did not spring from nothing, as with the big bang theory of the Universe.

There had been health provision for the working class before the war that was free of charge, but it had been very haphazard, with some areas over supplied and others very badly neglected. Also it relied upon charity. It was not there by right and most people saw a big difference. Bevan promoted a scheme that would abolish the stigma and unpredictability of charity and was comprehensive and open to all. And he



had to fight for it, even against opposition within his own party, and from the British Medical Association, who saw a threat to their own power within a government run scheme. But once the scheme had been publicised there was no going back.

Yet those were minor obstacles compared to a force that neither Bevan nor the Labour Party has ever properly understood, the forces of capitalist economics.

Money problems

The NHS had to be paid for, and the money had to come from the capitalist class. Ever since its inception the history of the NHS has been a story of trying to provide adequate funding. Every government has looked for ways to find the money and cut the costs, and every government has failed. The original set-up has been modified, tinkered with or altered repeatedly, all, we are told in the interests of efficiency. And every government produces a fresh plan with a fanfare of trumpets that promises to solve all problems. Bevan initiated a reform that would prove to be one of the biggest headaches of all time for his own party or for any party trying to run capitalism, including Margaret Thatcher, who thought she had the magic formula to solve all problems, privatisation, but



ended up by spending as much as anyone.

In truth there are many factors within capitalism which augur badly for the NHS. Although the trend for well-established capitalist countries is to move

from a production economy to a service economy, this can have problems.

Manufactured goods, once they are into full mass production generally go down in price, because they embody less labour-power. This is why the absolute standard of living of sections of the working class has improved.

But not all wealth can be mass-produced. Many jobs that require intensive labour-power cannot be made more productive by technology. But wages paid have to come into line with those of production workers where fewer workers still produce as much or more. This is why it is so expensive to have such things as electrical or building work done. Nursing comes into this category: you can't replace a nurse by a machine (although they do their best). So, if there are going to be enough nurses to run a

health service the total cost of nursing care has to go up. In addition to which, nurses have to be trained to manage the increasing technical demands of modern health care.

The government try to overcome this problem by the well-used tactic of recruiting from countries with lower wages, such as the West Indies, South Africa and Poland. Another tried and tested solution favoured by employers is that of up-grading, i.e. allowing some tasks to be undertaken by those not previously regarded as having the necessary skills; for example, encouraging nurses to undertake minor surgery, thus relieving some pressure on doctors.

But this is minor, compared to the increasing costs of drug treatment, which have risen to astronomical proportions since the NHS was founded. When Bevan dreamed up his panacea for the working class of Britain, which was going to be

the envy of the world, the practice of medicine was not as advanced as it is today. Drug treatment, as we know it today, apart from the heavy reliance on aspirin and the wartime use of penicillin, was unknown. Modern medical science was more or less born during the Second World War and it has made giant strides since, especially with regard to costs. Developing a modern medical drug can cost millions of pounds. And, as every reader of any newspaper must have noticed, new, 'wonder drugs' are launched with astonishing frequency, generally leading newspaper articles somewhere asking indignantly, "Why cannot this life saving drug be made available to anyone who needs it?" The pressures on the NHS are relentless, all of them making for increasing costs.

Population trends are swelling the numbers of old in relation to the young, and as we all know older people tend to have more illnesses, and their illnesses are more likely to take the form of expensive operations such as hip replacements. All these items are creating big problems for the NHS, and resulting in intensive press coverage, most of it highly critical, especially when it comes to waiting lists. It must be pointed out that this does not just apply to the NHS. Other capitalist institutions, paid for out of taxation levied upon the wealthy, are being cut, notably the armed forces, the police force and the fire service. And private (more or less) firms, which cannot apply technology to reduce costs (read, manpower), like the post office, are cutting the numbers of branches. So, what does the future hold for the NHS and its equivalents in other capitalist countries?

Decline

As the longest running institution of its kind the NHS is probably the creakiest in Europe, but there is nothing special about British capitalism that makes it more likely than any other to undergo decline. Most European countries are already showing signs of strain in funding their welfare systems and what applies to the UK must inevitably follow with them.

The conclusion must be that to fulfil the professed aims of Bevan for a health service that would cover the needs of the

working class was never more than a pipe dream. No government will dare to upset their masters to the extent necessary to maintain a decent health service. The most likely prognosis is that it will carry on much as now with an increasing bias towards private hospitals and treatment that is paid for at the point of consumption. In fact it never lived up to its hype from the

beginning; within months charges were being introduced for dental and optical services. There is no such thing as an adequate health service within a capitalist

system of society and there never can be. It seems the current trend is to go back to something similar to pre NHS, and have a two tier system where what you get will be what you pay for. The rise in private hospitals and health insurance is a potent



Peaks and troughs: a newly-opened ward in 1948 above and, below, a newly-closing hospital in more recent times



symbol of this trend.

No doubt most workers will conclude that any deficiencies in the NHS can be put right by a change of government and that it lies within the power of the political process to achieve a viable health system. This is a fallacy. The money system we live under is inherently biased towards satisfying the demands of a minority ruling class who are only concerned with having a working class fit enough to go to work and fight their wars for them. Capitalism can never be run in the interests of the majority and in any case will always throw up new problems of ill health as it progresses. The rickets and tuberculosis of the Victorians are being replaced by more sophisticated illnesses such as heart failure, stress and obesity of a more modern age, not to mention AIDS.

In a socialist society where the capacity for wealth production, unhampered by the colossal waste endemic to this one, can be released to the full, human values will predominate and energy can be concentrated on the causes of disease and its prevention. Issues such as the need for pharmaceuticals to make billions of pounds in profit will not exist. The NHS has managed to carry on so far as a more or less viable service largely due to the dedication and hard work of its members but this cannot last forever. ■

CYR

“The rickets and tuberculosis of the Victorians are being replaced by more sophisticated illnesses such as heart failure, stress and obesity”

The profit motive: a case study

In January Sony, the multinational electronics corporation, announced it is to declare 300 redundancies at its two factories in south Wales - 80 from the Bridgend factory, producing cathode ray tubes, and 220 from the TV factory adjacent to the M4 at Pencoed - a move that almost certainly signals the imminent closure of an operation that once employed 3,300 working people. This latest news will be of no surprise to those working in the two factories where Sony has been quietly shedding jobs since the late 1990s.

Production from these factories relies on 'old' tube technology and, as a spokesman explained, "The move away from CRT-based TVs accelerated last year with flat panel products now accounting for around half the UK market" (Guardian, 21 January). It is now evident that the managers employed in Japan to make profits for shareholders had decided by the late 1990s that investment to support flat screen televisions would go elsewhere and after 30 years have decided to call it a day in Wales. So where did it all go wrong?

Sony's Bridgend factory, officially opened by Prince Charles in 1974, was the first major manufacturing venture in the UK by a Japanese multinational corporation. The main imperative of capitalism is to expand - a fact well understood in Japan where by 1972 the country had the largest television industry in the world producing in excess of 8 million sets a year and a domestic market on the verge of saturation. Japanese exports had already devastated the American television industry and while UK imports of Japanese colour TVs were rising, UK manufacturers found some comfort under a 1962 treaty that limited imports of Japanese televisions.

Sony needed unrestricted access to European television market and the UK government was on the verge of joining the European Economic Community (EEC). Assembling televisions inside Europe would circumvent the agreement limiting imports and end the stream of accusations from European manufacturers that Japanese televisions were being 'dumped' on the

market at 'uneconomic' prices.

Welcomed

The British government was friendly to Japanese investment and politicians quickly warmed to the prospect of new jobs. This, combined with financial grants made available to ease job losses in traditional coal and steel industries, an established market and a region crying out for employment made Wales an attractive proposition. Bridgend was to be Sony's assembly base to compete in the EEC, a venture viewed by Britain's partners in Europe, particularly in Holland - the home of Philips - as a 'Trojan Horse,' an apt description for a company importing 90 percent of its components from Japan. In 1976 the British government, under pressure from the EEC and the European television industry, moved to protect 'home' producers. It agreed that unless 50 percent by value of components had European origin, sets could not claim to be 'British-made' and would therefore count towards Japanese import quotas agreed between the two industries. By this time, however, Sony was operational and employing over 500 people and compliance with this 'origin rule' was quietly forgotten.

Other Japanese television manufacturers followed and by 1977 Britain had 'overcapacity' in both set and component manufacture. The Radio Industry Council made representations to government for protection and again policy was altered. In future inward investment was to be encouraged provided it either took over existing capacity or resulted in joint ventures with established manufacturers - hence Rank-Toshiba and GEC-Hitachi. But by 1979 it was apparent that British television manufacturers were unable to compete with Japanese design and manufacturing technology and in October 1980, Pye at Lowestoft was shut with the loss of 1,100 jobs. Despite the higher wages paid to Japanese workers, "the direct labour cost of a set made in the UK was almost double that of one made in Japan because the

Japanese set took 1.9 hours to make and the British one 6.1 hours." (Keith Geddes, *The Setmakers*, 1991) Japanese television sets incorporated 30 percent fewer components by making greater use of integrated circuits, and automatic insertion accounted for 65 percent of components against 15 percent in the UK. These advantages forced a spate of factory closures and 'consolidations' as European producers tried desperately to compete.

Sony's output at Bridgend had now increased to a level that justified investment in a tube-manufacturing factory, built alongside the television factory and opened in 1982. This expansion was essential because Sony holds patent rights to a cathode ray tube - "Trinitron" - fundamentally different from its competitors and available only from Sony in Japan.



Cathode Ray Tubes - so last year...



Sony TVs, a view to a killing.

Local production was needed to reduce enormous importation costs. Further expansion to tube manufacturing came in 1989 when the television factory was relocated to a site 3 miles away allowing the tube factory to double in size. The new television factory - hailed as Sony's 'European Flagship' - was constructed on former farmland in Pencoed and opened in 1992 at a cost of £30 million. By the early 1990s Sony had a major share of the European television market and was locked in bitter competition with Philips. Output peaked at about 1.75 million televisions and

*Wage-end at
Bridgend: First
Sony giveth, then
Sony taketh away,
then Sony
investeth
somewhere else.*

computer monitors were added to the production line-up. The combined turnover of both plants was approximately £800 million.

But then things started to go sour. Intense competition from manufacturers producing high quality, low cost televisions and the collapse of a major market in Russia started to eat away at profits. The market demanded cost reductions, and Sony - which had traded for so long on a brand name that

marketing gurus had made synonymous with quality and price premiums - could not deliver, at least in Wales. A further threat emerged as Sony's recently opened television-factory in Barcelona, employing the latest technology, gathered momentum.

The 'centre of gravity' of the European TV market was moving eastwards and factories in Wales were no longer suitably placed. The company then negotiated generous grants and tax concessions and, eager to exploit cheap labour, opened new factories in Hungary and Slovakia to improve competitiveness in the growing east European market that had once been supplied by the Pencoe factory. The factories in Wales had served their purpose and utilising 'old' technology were now to be run-down while 'new' technology and investment went elsewhere. The workforce now lived under threat that production would be transferred unless profits improved, serving to keep wages and benefits fixed, while the trade union, effectively anaesthetised since the 1970s, collaborated with management on projects to increase profits. Desperate to cut costs, investment in manufacturing was slashed; internal component production contracted out, permanent workers were replaced by temporary employees and leavers not replaced. Discipline became oppressive and workers grew demoralised and indifferent to the continuous demands to improve performance. The company's reputation as an employer plummeted and official redundancies were first declared in April 2000.

The bottom line

So who is to blame? Why did the bubble burst? It would be easy to blame local management employed to squeeze profits from working people or the working people who became dispirited or perhaps even market conditions. But all this evades the fundamental issue that we live in an economic system that demands that corporations must roam the world in pursuit of lower costs to remain competitive to increase profits for shareholders. Sony, like any other corporation with global aspirations, cannot stop to consider how its working people, many employed since the beginning in 1974, are to survive when the factories in Wales close, as they must surely

do in the near future. The fact that Wales already suffers dire poverty and comparable jobs will virtually impossible to find is of no consequence on the balance sheet, where the only consideration can be the bottom line. It should not be forgotten that the social cost of Sony's years of successful profit-making in Wales was achieved at the expense of forcing thousands from employment in factories across Europe with all the misery and trauma this entails. The wheel has turned full circle and it is now the turn of people employed by Sony in Wales to be abandoned, cast aside in the pursuit of greater profits. This is capitalism.

In capitalist society there can be no allegiance or loyalty to a workforce or community. Production is motivated solely by profit, regardless of the social consequences. As a recent article in the Economist states, 'corporate social responsibility' - "a kinder, gentler capitalism," is a non-starter. Instead, we learn:

"The goal of a well-run company may be to make profits for its shareholders, but merely by doing that+the company is doing good works. Its employees willingly work for the company in exchange for wages; the transaction makes them better off" (22 January).

Now we are asked to shallow the outrageous proposition that capitalism has a benevolent social purpose - but try telling

that to the people until recently employed by Sony or those formerly employed by the thousands of other companies that have shed working people when higher profits are demanded. The choice is stark; the working class either sells its labour power in return for wages or salaries or goes without the essentials of life. This is not willingness but compulsion. It is wage slavery.

Capitalism has outlived its usefulness and must be immediately replaced by socialism. Capitalism divides the world's population into two classes, the majority who sell their labour power in return for wages and salaries and those who own the means of producing wealth and live on profits. It is class struggle where workers will always be the losers, with the impending closure of Sony in south Wales a testimony to opposing class interests of workers and owners. As ex-Sony workers go about rebuilding their lives, they, and working people everywhere would do well to reflect on the fact that capitalism cannot operate in any other way and is incapable of being reformed to do so. Like millions before them, capitalism has condemned these workers to an uncertain future, breeding the stress and anxiously that is linked to a Jobcentre interview likely to lead nowhere. ■

STEVE TROTT



Cooking the Books (2)

What classless society?

At one time, a long time ago now, when the Labour Party still retained some sort of vague commitment to being opposed to the workings of capitalism it used to say that it favoured the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. They were going (they said) to establish a more equal society by taxing the rich and using the money to provide better public services for the rest of us.

Actually, in the last century there was a long-term trend towards a less uneven distribution of wealth ownership. But this did not result from any deliberate policy on the part of governments (the wealthy soon found ways of minimising or avoiding taxes on their existing wealth and on their accumulation of more wealth), but rather from a majority of people coming to own more consumer goods, etc. resulting in the total amount of wealth owned by the non-rich sections of society rising faster than the total amount owned by the wealthy.

The rich still got richer - and, in absolute terms, each one of them got more than each of the rest of us - but, proportionately, together they got less than the rest of us as a group. There was no redistribution from them to us; which would have gone against the logic of capitalism involving as it does the accumulation of more

and more capital in the hands of a capitalist class.

In the 1990s this long-term trend (which continued even under Thatcher) was reversed. Since 1991 the rich have been getting richer faster than the rest of us - despite a Labour government. In December the Office for National Statistics published the figures for the latest available year, 2002. Two sets of figures are published, one for all marketable wealth and the other for "marketable wealth less value of dwellings". Since capitalism is based on the concentration of the ownership of the means of wealth-production in the hands of a tiny minority, and since houses are not means of production, it is the second set of figures that are the more relevant (even if they still include other items of wealth such as cars and hi-fi equipment that are also not means of production).

These figures (published on the ONS website at http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cc/nugget_print.asp?ID=2) show how things have changed since 1996, as the situation inherited by the present Labour government when it came into office:

	1996	1999	2000	2001	2002
Top 1% owned	26	34	33	34	35
Top 5%	49	59	59	58	62
Bottom 95%	51	41	41	42	38
Bottom 50%	6	3	2	2	2

As can be seen, whereas in 1996 the top 5 percent owned as much as the bottom 95 per cent - or one out of every 19 persons owned as much as the other 19 (of whom half owned virtually nothing) taken together - by 2002 the top 5 percent owned nearly 40 percent than the rest of us.

Who says that we're living in a classless society? Who says that the capitalist class have died out? Who says that the Labour Party can deliver a more equal society or is even trying to?

More reasons not to shop

Joanna Blythman: *Shopped: The Shocking Power of British Supermarkets*. Harper Perennial £7.99.



Supermarkets: places to buy food at low prices, selling a wide range of produce in bright well-lit shops situated in convenient locations, with everything designed to make life easier for customers. If that's your view of what supermarkets

are, then *Shopped* is likely to change your mind.

For one thing the illusion of choice is just that - an illusion. Many companies make ready meals for a variety of supermarket chains, for instance. More generally, the supermarkets sell what suits them, not what the customer might want. Fruit and veg in particular have to fit a standard model in terms of size, colour and shape, just because that makes them easier (= cheaper) to transport and display. Any offerings that don't come up to standard (e.g. because of minor blemishes) will be rejected, at the supplier's expense. This might include, for instance, cauliflowers that are 'not white enough'. One consequence of this emphasis on uniformity is a drastic reduction in the number of varieties grown, which puts in danger the genetic spread that can help to reduce the impact of disease.

The suppliers (from largish companies to small farmers) are often at the supermarkets' mercy in other ways too. They may be encouraged to sell their produce to one chain exclusively, invest in new equipment, and then be dropped from the approved list for no apparent reason. If they complain about the supermarket's stranglehold on their sales, they will be threatened with delisting. Customer complaints are passed on by the supermarkets to the suppliers. Low prices at the counter are enabled by ever-lower prices to the supplier: cereal farmers, for instance, get just 8 percent of the price of a loaf of bread.

Supermarket profits of course come not just from the way they exercise their power over the suppliers, but from the way they exploit their own staff. With pay rates at levels like £4.94 an hour, compared to the £4million that the boss of Tesco's was paid in 2003, it's easy to see why some of the bigger chains have an annual staff turnover exceeding 20 percent.

And the 'fresh' food they sell is often not fresh at all. It is quite likely picked prematurely, before developing its full flavour, so it can withstand a few days' shelf life and then a few more in the customer's home. Taste and nutrition come a long way second to appearance and how long the food will keep. Wholesale markets like Covent Garden now supply greengrocers and

restaurants with decent fruit and veg, while supermarket shelves are weighed down with tasteless, unripe pap, much of it grown on vast plantations in places such as Lincolnshire.

Nor is food-selling the be-all-and-end-all. Supermarkets have for some time been expanding into areas like insurance, wills, credit cards, books, CDs, key-cutting, and so on. If they could get away with it, they'd probably stop selling unprocessed food (processed food is far more profitable), but they know that 'fresh' meat and veg does get customers into the stores. Tesco is approaching a 30 percent share in UK consumer spending (that's total spending, not just on food).

One of the blurbs the cover of *Shopped* says it "should be required reading in every household". Well, the *Socialist Standard* would be a better choice for this, but *Shopped* does give a pretty good idea of the power of big companies under capitalism and the reasons why the customer is certainly not in charge. **PB**

The Windmills of Change

In Search of Sustainability. Edited by J. Goldie, B. Douglas, and B. Furnass. CSIRO Publishing, Australia 2005.

Sustainability can be an unquestionably good thing or not - it depends on what you want to sustain. In this collection of twelve essays by academics in different fields of environmental research the editors define sustainability as "the capacity of human systems to provide for the full range of human concerns in the long term."

Sustainability, when applied to humans, refers both to long-term survival of our species and the quality of our lives."

There are chapters on ten areas of concern: health, inequality, limited growth, land use, water, climate change, energy, transport, work and population. A final chapter is about achieving a sustainable future. The recommendations are all of a



All at sea: an off-shore wind farm

"motherhood" nature and well known to those in the environmental trade. For example, "children must better understand the ecological framework within which the human species lives", we must "shift away from the pursuit of economic growth as an end in itself" and promote "affordable renewable technologies."

Plenty of talk about key issues we must address, challenges we must face, changes in our current approaches we must make. But not a solid word about the need to fundamentally change the system from capitalism to something else. Capitalism does get a mention in the article on limiting growth, but the worry there is that capitalism will collapse and throw everything into chaos.

The editors believe that sustainability "can provide the vision we need to draw together the government, the private sector community and academics to help solve our many deep-seated problems." So no real revolution there, then. Indeed, one of the contributors trots out what amounts to the "human nature" objection to socialism. Comparing modern nation-states to ancestral warring tribes, he suggests that "this competitiveness, selfishness and 'short termism' is deeply programmed into the human species." It may suit defenders of capitalism to draw attention to such alleged deep programming, but socialists rely on other demonstrable characteristics of the human species: mutual aid, co-operation and (despite the dominant ideology of capitalism) the capacity to think and plan for the long term.

SRP

TV Review

Apocalypse Not Yet

Supervolcano
Sun 13th and Mon 14th March, BBC1
Supervolcano: The Truth About
Yellowstone
Sun 13th and Mon 14th March, BBC2

Considering that science is a constant adventure of astonishing discovery it's amazing how many people have no interest in it, a fact which explains why 'serious' programmes like BBC *Horizon* are nevertheless obliged to adopt a relentlessly sensational and tabloid approach to everything they do. Drama documentaries about super-eruptions killing off most of the USA are the apotheosis of TV schedulers' attempts to tick their public service education boxes and still keep the viewers. 'Super-volcano overdue!' they cry. 'Millions dead!' 'Civilisation in ruins!' Buried underneath a hundred feet of hyperbole, like a dead dog at Pompeii, is the prosaic fact that this event is only really expected some time in the next 60,000 years and that meanwhile there may be more pressing concerns facing us all.

One wonders if viewers would be so interested if the offending volcano was one of those in the Sumatra chain, like the Toba volcano that apparently brought us to the edge of extinction 74,000 years ago. Or does the idea of cataclysm in the heart of the world's only superpower carry with it the extra frisson of schadenfreude, as we contemplate the Americans being spectacularly trashed instead of dishing it out for a change? Perhaps it is simply logical that a major disaster in America would have more far-reaching effects across the world because as we all know America is the prop holding up global civilisation.

Interest in supervolcanoes and Yellowstone in particular was sparked by



The Pinatubo eruption - peanuts by comparison

Horizon five years ago, but the recent tsunami has primed the TV viewer for a big 'what-if' docu-drama and the sleeping giant in Wyoming is clearly an irresistible subject. Besides, Hollywood proved with *'The Day After Tomorrow'* that disaster sells, especially if you sex up the boring facts a little. Given that capitalism is such a miserable struggle for existence for most people there's a strong psychological impulsion to comfort oneself in the knowledge that things could be a lot worse, and for morale's sake it's best to find something that can't be blamed on capitalism.

But for all the Armageddon prophesying, what would really be the result of such an event? The four horsemen of the apocalypse would have to ride forth and ravage the New World in their spare time, since they're already so busy elsewhere. Imagine making a programme with the idea that five million kids were going to die pointlessly because they couldn't get decent drinking water. Viewers would switch over to Pop Idols immediately. Natural disasters like that happen already, so what's exciting about that? Besides, goes the secret thinking, they're just poor black kids and they've all got AIDS anyway.

What would make a programme like this truly scary is if it was made in the context of a cooperative socialist society. If socialists wanted to give each other nightmares, they couldn't do better than

paint millenarian scenarios of a breakdown of production and a return to capitalism to each other. But of course, people in a socialist society would be life-affirming and positive about the future, not paranoid and neurotic neurasthenics paralysed into hopeless contemplation of a society that is in reality one long slow-motion train-wreck. Yellowstone wouldn't kill a fraction of the people that capitalism routinely kills every year. Capitalism is the world's worst natural disaster bar none. Now, where's the drama documentary about that?

PJS.

Africa: A Marxian Analysis.

A 30-page pamphlet on Africa, mainly reprints of articles from the *Socialist Standard* and mainly written by socialists living in Africa. Marx's materialist conception of history and analysis of society is applied to:

- **state and class in pre-colonial West Africa**
- **Tribalism**
- **colonialism and capitalism**
- **religion, race and class**
- **Sharia law in Nigeria**
- **the education system in Ghana**
- **South Africa in the 20th century**

Available from *The Socialist Party*. £1.
(£1.35 by post, send cheque payable to
"The Socialist Party of Great Britain" to
52 Clapham High St, London SW4 7UN).

Obituary

JOHN BALL

John was someone I first came across in the early 90s in Norwich along with Heather prior to us all being properly acquainted with the Socialist Party. Our enthusiasm for responsible anti-authoritarian values and the politics of a world so different from this one, along with the reasonably close proximity of our houses helped to create a lasting bond and friendship.

John was born in Plumstead, in London, in 1932 and worked for most of his working life as an electrician. He was a warm and generous person, very down to earth who would call a spade a spade; at the same time he could be very understanding with people he got close to whose conclusions may have been different from his own, seeing the basis of those conclusions as a possible connection to build on. He was well-read and enjoyed connecting with people of all ages and backgrounds and had a penchant for helping the underdog sometimes to the detriment of his health. He was a vegan, painted in oils, and loved upbeat music and dancing.

Towards the end of his life John would say that he felt ever more convinced that the Party's sole pursuit of socialism and not reformism was the correct and only practical solution to the ongoing problems that a capitalist world is always throwing up. He recognised the importance of humour, connected to a constructive politics and philosophy in contrast to the sober authoritarian politics of the Left he was always falling foul of in the earlier period of his life (he had been in the Communist Party, which he left in 1957, and then in the Trotskyist SLL, from which he was expelled in 1960).

John died in February. I'm sure his way of being would and did affect positively many people he had come across throughout his life.

STAIR

Fifty Years Ago

For what is the Labour Party fighting?

Having had six years in power running capitalism the Labour Party is on the outside looking around for a way to get back again. Now as it is not generally thought that the Labour Government merely ran capitalism let us explain what we mean by capitalism, in order to see if we are correct when we claim that the Labour Party is just another capitalist party.

Capitalism is the social system which exists today throughout the world, wherein the means of production and distribution are owned by a fraction of the people (the capitalist class, state or private) and the mass of people being without means of production MUST work for WAGES in order to live. Further the wealth of capitalist society (produced by the workers but not owned by them) is produced for SALE and PROFIT, that

profit being the capitalists' loot from the exploitation of the class of employees. To sum up, the basic features of capitalism are - class ownership - wage labour, buying and selling and profit.

You will note we say class ownership not private enterprise, we say "state or private" because it is the basis we are concerned with not merely the form of administration. From the very start the Labour Party never sought to change the basis, to abolish capitalism, they merely proposed another form of administration. After six years in Government the whole ugly structure of capitalism remained intact, and still no proposal to abolish wages, buying and selling and class ownership is forthcoming. The Labour Party has no horizons beyond those of capitalism and when all the schemes have been put into operation the position of the working class will be exactly the same. The past record of the Labour Party in supporting wars, freezing wages, breaking strikes, and forming coalitions, with Tories and

Liberals, should be enough to finish them with the working class for keeps; the tragedy is that it won't. (...)

Throughout its existence the Labour Party has done everything but what need doing most and said everything but what most needed saying. Although from time to time they paid lip-service by using Socialist sounding phrases when it met their purpose of deluding the workers, nothing they have ever said or done has advanced the workers one inch. While certain of their reforms might have helped in keeping workers contented and in staving off unrest, they have had the desired effect of giving the boss class a new lease of life. What would the capitalist class do without a Labour Party to patch up their vile system for them?

(From an article by 'H.B.', *Socialist Standard*, April 1955)



Election News

By the time you read this the general election campaign might be officially under way. As announced, the Socialist Party is standing a candidate (Danny Lambert) in the Vauxhall constituency in South London. Our Head Office, which is in the constituency, is serving as the campaign rooms. If you want to help get the socialist message across against the Gang of Three (Labour,

Liberal, Tory: Same Old Futile Story) and their apprentices in the Green Party (and other would-be managers of capitalism such as RESPECT and VANITAS), phone 0207 622 3811 or call in at 52 Clapham High St, SW4 (nearest tube: Clapham North).

If you are connected to the internet you can also follow the campaign on a daily basis by visiting the site of our campaign blog "Vaux Populi" at <http://spgb.blogspot.com>

World Socialism Needs You!

Without your support and understanding Socialism cannot be achieved. If you want to join the Socialist movement, to help to bring capitalism to a rapid end, go along to your nearest Branch or send for a membership application form.

Please send me an application form and membership details (without obligation).

NAME:.....

ADDRESS:.....

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POSTCODE.....

And send to: The Socialist Party
52 Clapham High Street
London SW4 7UN

Meetings

Manchester Day School

Saturday 23 April, 1-5 pm
Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, City Centre (off Albert Square)

Theme: 'World Poverty'

Speakers:
Adam Buick ('Third World Poverty and the Anti-capitalist Movement')
Paddy Shannon ('Can Socialism End World Poverty?').
Refreshments available.

LANCASTER

Public Meeting
Monday 4th April, 8pm.
WHAT WILL THE ABOLITION OF CAPITALISM DO TO THE ARTS?
The Gregson Centre, Moorgate, Lancaster.

WEST LONDON

Tuesday 19 April, 8pm
THE ELECTION: DON'T BE A MUG: VOTE FOR YOURSELF FOR A CHANGE.
Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, W4 (nearest tube: Chiswick Park).

NORWICH

Discussion Meeting
Saturday 30 April, 12 noon
Welcome. Questions and discussions for new visitors
1.00pm Meal, followed by assessment and discussion of items on recent Annual Conference Agenda.
The Conservatory, back room of The Rosary Tavern, Rosary Road, Norwich.

Manchester Branch talk

Monday 25 April, 8 pm
Hare and Hounds, Shudehill, City Centre
'What Capitalism Does to Your Food'

SWANSEA BRANCH

Monday 11 April. 7.30 pm.
"Election activity. Is it worth it?"
Unitarian Church, High St, Swansea (next to Argos).

LONDON DAY SCHOOL

Saturday 9 April. 11am to 5pm.
PRACTICAL SOCIALISM: COMMON OWNERSHIP
11.30am What do we mean by common ownership?
Speaker: Adam Buick
1.30 - 2.30pm Lunch Break
2.30pm How distribution could be organised without money.
Speaker: Bill Martin
Room 11. Friends House, Euston Rd (Side entrance), NW1
Nearest tubes: Euston, Euston Square

Declaration of Principles

This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.

Object

The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.

Declaration of Principles
The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e., land, factories, railways, etc.)

by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.

2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.

3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.

4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom,

the emancipation of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.

6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.

7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.

8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.



On tactical voting

Here is something else for all those bewildered and dispirited Labour supporters to blame on Blair and his government. In their glory days of 1997 and 2001 voting was a happily uncomplicated business, requiring them only to go to their local

polling station and plonk their cross against the name of their New Labour candidate, then go home congratulating themselves on participating in the drive to raise living standards, make everyone healthier and more secure, tackle global poverty and climate change.

But since then it has been borne in on the most starry-eyed Labourite that their party is not only unable to make good on its promises but has carried through other, unpromised and unwelcome, policies like cutting single parent benefit and hounding those on incapacity benefit, imposing student tuition fees, introducing the market into the NHS and other public services, taking part in the invasion of Iraq. All of this makes voting, for many a Labour supporter, a matter fraught with indecision. There has been an anguished debate from which has emerged - or rather re-emerged - the concept of tactical voting. This means voting for a second choice candidate - like a Liberal Democrat - in the hope that this will influence the Labour government to change its policies. This is a sight more complex than simply opting for their first choice candidate.

A jolt

The case for tactical voting has recently been stated by John Harris in his book *So Now Who Do We Vote For?*, in which a Labour ex-minister outlines his dilemma:

"And why don't we like Michael Howard? Partly because of his right wing record when he was home secretary. But we're more right wing than Michael Howard was. I'm not saying I want the Tories, but how bad would it be? The thing is, the Labour party needs a fright."



Harris concludes that in Labour heartlands like Scotland, Wales, South Yorkshire and London "the Blairites need a jolt". He discusses some of the other parties - the SNP, Plaid Cymru, Green, Respect - which, if they amassed a considerable vote, would administer that jolt. This line of reasoning does not recognise the futility of voting for one unsatisfactory party in order to disturb another. After all it is not so long ago that voting Labour was sometimes used to give a Tory government a jolt. There must be another, more hopeful, more enduring method.

A rather desperate-sounding parliamentary group under the name of "Impeach Blair" has campaigned to get Blair on trial for his part in the Iraq war and the deceptions he practised in that cause. The idea made very little progress, which is probably just as well because Blair may have been able to defend himself successfully on the grounds that he was only following precedent. For example there was Neville Chamberlain who in 1938 came back from Munich holding a piece of paper which, he claimed, was a guarantee of peace in our time, although even as he spoke this country - and quite a few others - were busily preparing for war. Then there was Anthony Eden, who in 1956 lied to the House of Commons when he denied that, in order to justify the attack on Suez, there had been a conspiracy between Israel, France and Britain to collude in the Israeli invasion of Egypt. Blair might point out that Eden, far from being prosecuted, was elevated into being Lord Avon. An acquittal would undoubtedly follow.

Standing in Sedgefield

As a result the group turned its attention to an idea dreamed up by Adam Price, a Plaid Cymru MP who is threateningly rumoured to be a

brainy maverick, to persuade someone to stand against Blair in his Sedgefield constituency. This person would need to be - rather like Martin Bell in Tatton in 1997 and Blair in his younger days - of impeccable character and antecedents and to be allowed a clear run by the other parties, to focus the anger against Blair effectively enough to unseat him. As we write nobody has been found to take this on. Sedgefield has been rock-solid Labour for over 90 years; the people there are apt to refer to Blair as "our Tony" (perhaps as the people of Tatton called Neil Hamilton "our Neil" before they threw him out in 1997) and in 2001 they gave him a majority close on 18,000.

It would be highly unusual, if not unprecedented, for a sitting prime minister to be opposed at an election by a single candidate. This did happen in 1945, when Winston Churchill's seat at Epping was contested by Alexander Hancock. The other parties had agreed not to stand in Epping, as a "mark of respect" for Churchill, but there were unacknowledged advantages for them in allowing "the man who won the war" to have a free ride to Westminster. However there were people who did not accept this; most prominent among them was William Douglas-Home whose brother, then Lord Dunglass, was Chamberlain's Parliamentary Private Secretary, closely involved in the Munich negotiations which effectively handed Czechoslovakia to Nazi Germany. Douglas-Home was an ardent fan of Chamberlain and a bitter critic of Churchill; during his time in the Army in the war he fought three by-elections in opposition to the manner in which the war was being conducted. In September 1944 he refused an order to participate in the "mopping up" of the German army in Le Havre, on the grounds that this would result in heavy civilian casualties - which, when the attack came, did happen. Douglas-Home was court martialled, discharged from the Army and sentenced to a year's imprisonment with hard labour.

Contest in Epping

With this background Douglas-Home was an obvious possibility to ignore the party truce and stand against Churchill at Epping. He did at first intend to do this but then withdrew, which allowed Arthur Yates, another soldier (although not one who disobeyed orders; the Daily Mail affectionately described him as "an earnest, hardened and freckled young man") to stand in his stead. The Army flew Yates over from Austria for his nomination but he arrived too late, which left the field to Alexander Hancock, who got his name on the ballot papers as an Independent. Hancock was a local farmer; Churchill dismissed him as "somewhat crackpot" and it is true that he did have an unusual approach to politics.

To begin with he confessed not to have any desire to become an MP or to deny that to Churchill. When he was asked about his chances of defeating Churchill he shrugged "could anyone?" His principal objective was to publicise his "philosophical plan" under which "able bodied" people would do about an hour's compulsory work each day to provide the essentials of life and spend the rest of the time producing non-essentials. It might have occurred to the more reflective voters in Epping that the plans put forward by the other parties for trying to control British capitalism had little more than did Hancock's to commend them in terms of relevance and effectiveness. At all events over 10,000 of them voted for Hancock, or perhaps that was, in fact, tactically against Churchill, who survived with a majority of around 17,000.

Sadism and masochism

If someone is willing to offer themselves as another Alexander Hancock it will be in response to the widespread anger and disgust at Blair and the fact that his party's record in government has led to many ex-supporters feeling they are disenfranchised. Labour's election manipulators are already worried about the possibility that they will lose some seats by default because a lot of its supporters will be unable to summon up enough enthusiasm even to vote. To such people the prospect of a candidate taking on Blair one-to-one in his own territory has its attractions. If the unthinkable happened sadists might find pleasure in the downfall of a politician as plausible, dishonest and obsessive as Blair. But what then? Blair was after all once the great young hope of the Labour Party and of millions of people outside the party. What

reason is there to suppose that a successor would be any different, any more acceptable? Why should we believe

that another party, brought to power through tactical voting, would be any more successful? What hope is there that it would be useful to concentrate on one problem, one leader, one election? The working class persist in choosing between different versions of the same weary, discredited palliatives for capitalism's problems. This is not sadism; it is masochism and it will be a massive relief when it stops. ■

IVAN





Voice from the Back

What fun!

The newspapers are always reminding us that the US expeditions to Afghanistan and Iraq were carried out for humanitarian reasons, so it is good to be reminded from time to time of the mind-set of some of the combatants in those conflicts. "Actually it's quite fun to fight them, you know. It's a hell of a hoot. It's fun to shoot some people." Lieut. General James Mattis, who commanded U.S. Marine expeditions in Afghanistan and Iraq, in comments during a panel discussion for which he was later reprimanded." *Time* (14 February).

Mind the gap

The gap between the rhetoric of politicians and the economic realities of capitalism is a very large one. Here is a recent example. "As Tony Blair argued that a precautionary approach to greenhouse gas emission was vital to prevent environmental disaster, the European Commission threatened legal action because the UK wanted to raise the amount of carbon that industry is allowed to pump out under the European emission trading scheme. The government was accused of caving in to business led by the Confederation of British Industry" *The Observer* (20 February). They are messing up our world, how do you feel about that? Pass the inhaler we feel a little sick.

Useless toil

One of the most attractive features about a future socialist society is that it will do away with a lot of dangerous, dirty and nasty occupations. Think of a society without arms manufacture, armies,

policemen, jailers, prostitutes, bankers, insurance men and debt collectors. One of the multi-billion dollar industries that will disappear is the advertising and marketing con game. How big an industry is revealed in the following figures of some of the big global advertising spenders. "Procter & Gamble \$5.6 bn, Unilever \$3.54 bn, General Motors \$3.4 bn." *The Observer* (27 February). It is reckoned that \$60 billion will be spent this year telling you what kind of toothpaste to use, clothes to wear, food to eat and what kind of credit card is "in" this year. What a madhouse.

Nice for some

In January we reported that according to the International Labour Organisation 1.4 billion, the highest number ever, were living on less than \$2 a day and 550 million were living on less than \$1 a day. So it is only proper that we report the other side of the coin as reported by the 2005 Forbes dollar billionaire list. "Topping the list for the 11th year running is the Microsoft boss Bill Gates, worth £24.1 billion. The 19th annual list shows the world's rich getting ever richer, with a total of 691 billionaires. Lakshmi Mittal, the steel magnate who has backed the Labour Party, increased his net worth by £9.7 billion to £13 billion" *The Times* (11 March).



Lakshmi Mittal, with unnamed employee

Riding the tiger

Piers Morgan was made editor of the *News of the World* when he was only 28 years of age. Within two years he was editor of the *Daily Mirror*, a job he held for nine years until his "exclusive" of fake pictures of British guards abusing Iraqi prisoners was exposed. He has now published his memoirs *The Insider: The Private Diaries of a Scandalous Decade*. It is the usual mix of celebrity-spotting and anecdotes that such memoirs tend to be. Here is an extract from a book review that reveals the high-minded thinking of our leaders. "Before the 1997 general election Morgan suggested to Blair that he shouldn't forget his friends at the Labour-supporting *Daily Mirror* in his cosying up to Murdoch to win the "vote" of the *The Sun*. 'Piers, I had to court him', said Blair. 'It is better to be riding the tiger's back than let it rip your throat out. Look at what Murdoch did to Kinnock'" *The Times* (12 March).

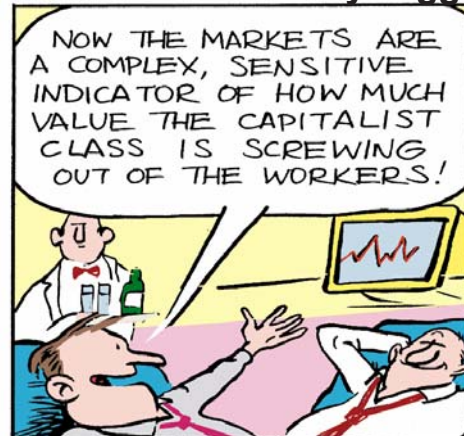
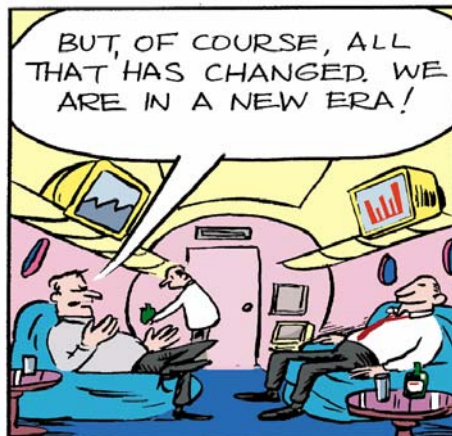
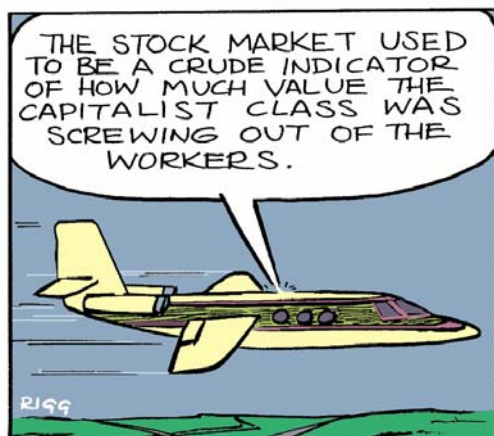


Piers the tiger

Read it and weep

Jeffrey D. Sachs, head of Columbia University's Earth Institute and special adviser to UNO chief Kofi Annan has just written a book called *The End of Poverty*. Being by a reformer who thinks that capitalism can solve the problem of world hunger, the book has limited value, but what cannot be denied is the mass of information that Sachs has gathered on the state of world hunger today. It makes for awful reading. "Currently more than 8 million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive." Every morning our newspapers could report "More than 20,000 people perished yesterday of extreme poverty." How? The poor die in hospital wards that lack drugs, in villages that lack anti-malarial bed nets, in homes that lack safe drinking water. They die namelessly, without public concern. Sadly such statistics rarely get written" *Time* (14 March).

Free lunch



by Rigg

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